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National Intelligence Bulletin

October 9, 1975

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PORTUGAL

The Portuguese Communist Party yesterday called for a conference between government leaders and parties of the left in what it described as an effort to prevent the current wave of political unrest in the military from turning into civil war. At the same time it threw its weight behind the spread of military mutinies and civil disturbances.

The Communists placed the blame for the current turmoil on the Socialist-dominated government's efforts to purge pro-Communists and other leftists from the military, the media, and other positions of influence. The Communists plan to use the proposed conference to press for an end to the purges. The party said the current political deterioration could be reversed only by reinforcing "revolutionary" forces both in the government and in the ruling Revolutionary Council.

The Communists may be on the point of dropping all pretense of support for the government. A party statement issued yesterday praised the political agitation in army units as "a magnificent riposte" to the attempts by "reactionaries" to swing the country to the right. The party's call for removing "reactionaries" from command positions shows that it has no intention of backing Azevedo's efforts to restore military discipline.

A well-placed source close to the Prime Minister has told US embassy officials that President Costa Gomes' habitual indecision and lack of full support are further crippling Azevedo's efforts. According to this source, Costa Gomes reportedly is now advising Azevedo to "broaden" the government, a course urged upon the President by Brezhnev and Podgorny during Costa Gomes' recent visit to Moscow. The source claims that Azevedo told him privately that he would resign in "a week or so" if he is unable to resolve the problem of military discipline.

In the North

Extreme leftist soldiers yesterday remained in control of a heavy artillery regiment outside the northern city of Porto. A military spokesman said that further efforts would be made to resolve the problem through negotiation, but it seems likely that force will be required if the mutiny is to be put down.

Last night about 50 people were injured when left-wing civilian supporters of the rebellious regiment fired pistols and threw rocks at thousands of Popular Democrats marching in support of the government. This is the first incident in the recent wave of unrest that has resulted in such a large number of casualties.

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SPAIN-MOROCCO

Spain now may be taking more seriously the reports of a possible Moroccan incursion into Spanish Sahara.

According to the US defense attache in Madrid, Spain may be in the process of reinforcing its troops in Spanish Sahara and the Canary Islands. The airfield at Lanzarote, in the Canary Islands, was closed to civilian traffic yesterday, reportedly because of troop movements. The attache believes this may indicate that the 800-man infantry battalion stationed at Lanzarote has been transferred to Spanish Sahara. This battalion normally is maintained on standby as a reinforcement unit for Spanish Sahara.

The attache also is attempting to confirm the reported move of an additional parachute battalion to the Canary Islands.

Thus far, the Spanish military have been skeptical of reports about a possible Moroccan attack. Precautionary defensive measures had been taken with troops already in the Canaries and Spanish Sahara, but until now there had been no reports of a meaningful reinforcement of ground troops from the Spanish mainland.

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LEBANON

Lebanese authorities say all sides have agreed to yet another cease-fire, following the heavy fighting that broke out Tuesday night in the southern and eastern suburbs of Beirut.

This is the sixth cease-fire announced since the fighting spread to Beirut three weeks ago, but the security forces are still making little headway in separating the Muslim and Christian militiamen. Heavy fighting also broke out again in the Tripoli-Zagharta area, where the army has been trying to maintain a buffer zone between the opposing forces. Ten army commandos were killed in that fighting. Fighting was continuing in Beirut late last night, despite the cease-fire.

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The latest outbreak has increased the possibility that the less radical fedayeen organizations—Fatah and Saiqa—will cease cooperating with the security forces in the effort to control the fighting. Lebanese security officials report that over the past few days they have detected a change in attitude on the part of Saiqa and Fatah officials, who now are arguing that they cannot control the actions of the Lebanese and the “rejectionist” fedayeen groups.

Prime Minister Karami will confer with Syrian President Asad in Damascus this morning. Karami will almost certainly ask Asad to try again to mediate. Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam, who returned to Damascus in late September after an abortive effort to halt the fighting, will probably be asked to return to Beirut.

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ARGENTINA

The relative political lull during President Maria Estela Peron's absence from the capital is giving way to growing controversy centering on her prospective return, scheduled for next week. While Peron herself has lost effective power and is unlikely to gain it back, the question of who will assume it is far from resolved.

Presidential spokesmen have said that Peron is well and plans to return to Buenos Aires on October 17 to address a mass rally marking Juan Peron's rise to power. A move may be under way, however, to persuade her to remain out of the picture, or at most accept a passive role. Some observers fear the possibility of violence if dissident Peronists—including the terrorist Montoneros—seek to disrupt the rally.

The eventual disposition of effective power will, of course, affect most directly the current governing team, led by Acting President Luder, Interior Minister Robledo, and Economy Minister Cafiero. They have managed to restore a measure of confidence in the government. All three realize that unless there is a satisfactory solution to the political problem of Peron's status, their ability to continue functioning will diminish steadily.

In addition, all three are potential contenders in the presidential election scheduled for 1977. For this reason, each has his own preferred solution to the problem. Luder, who is chief among those who favor Peron's continued absence, hopes to continue exercising presidential authority and build a case for his eventual election to a full term. Robledo, on the other hand, is said to favor restoring Peron to the presidency, at least as a figurehead, which would remove Luder from the scene. Cafiero, who has deftly avoided being identified with either side, would nonetheless benefit from Luder's departure; he would have one less person to contend with.

The military, whose unity and behind-the-scenes influence on politics have increased greatly in recent months, are eyeing the situation with concern. The high command is anxious to prolong the relative effectiveness of the Luder team—particularly its efforts to centralize the anti-terrorist struggle—and is dismayed by the resurging debate over Peron's role. Most officers probably favor her continued absence but would accept her return in a ceremonial role. They still favor a constitutional solution but are more likely than before to intervene openly, should political struggles once again paralyze the government.

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LAOS

The French on October 7 announced that their 60-man military mission will be withdrawn from Laos by the end of this year. The mission was established following the Geneva Accords of 1954 to provide training for the Lao army.

According to the French commander in Vientiane, Paris decided to withdraw the mission because training activities had come to a virtual halt following the collapse of the Lao coalition last May. During the summer, the communists closed Lao army training sites and assigned the disarmed enlisted ranks to manual labor. Officers were sent to the hinterlands for lengthy reindoctrination sessions. The French have denied press reports that the Lao are negotiating a new military assistance agreement with Paris, claiming that the Pathet Lao have shown no interest in French instruction.

The Lao communists clearly wish to eliminate all Western influence in Vientiane, and the French may have decided to bow out now rather than be forced out later. French military advisers were forced to evacuate Pakse in southern Laos hurriedly last July, following communist-inspired demonstrations.

The French are unhappy with Lao moves against French business interests. Officials in Paris say they still intend to continue their cultural, economic, and education programs in Vientiane for at least the next year. They seem to realize, however, that the Lao communists, who do not share the rightists' regard for French culture, might at any time force a further reduction in their presence.

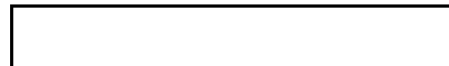
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